

MICHIGAN HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
TESTIMONY BEFORE THE HOUSE MICHIGAN COMPETITIVENESS COMMITTEE

Regarding

HB4148, Community College Baccalaureate Bill

October 1, 2014

James A. Lorenson, President
Gogebic Community College
Ironwood, Michigan

Good Afternoon, Mr. Chairman and Representatives. My name is James Lorenson, and I am the President of Gogebic Community College, located in Ironwood--on the far western edge of Michigan's Upper Peninsula. I am here this afternoon to speak to House Bill 4148, the Community College Baccalaureate Bill, or as I like to refer to it—"The Options in Developing Michigan's Workforce Bill."

Gogebic is one of the state's 28 public community colleges, and very likely serves the most rural region; five of the counties we serve are among Michigan's most rural, as measured by population density, and have been classified as economically disadvantaged. We are a comprehensive community college, offering academic transfer and occupational programming, community services, and student support services. Our student population is 51% non-traditional, 61% female, 41% part-time, has an average age of 23 years, and over 70% of our students qualify for financial aid. About 42% of our students are enrolled in occupational programs and 37% in academic transfer programs.

Our graduation and retention rates exceed the state and regional averages and last year nearly 99% of the respondents in our annual graduate survey indicated that they had achieved their post-secondary goal and would recommend Gogebic to others. For the past two years we have experienced increases in enrollment of about 2.5% annually.

The nearest Michigan four-year college and university is 2 ½ hours away, Michigan Technological University (MTU)—as you know we measure distance in time in the Upper Peninsula; Northern Michigan University (NMU) is just over 3 hours distant. In neighboring Wisconsin, the nearest public baccalaureate granting institutions are 2 hours distant. None are reasonable daily commutes. A map highlighting these distances is attached to this testimony.

House CCB Testimony, October 1, 2014

The region we serve, besides being rural, is economically disadvantaged, has a median family income 30% below the state-wide average, and lacks consistent broadband capability, which is a significant barrier to online instruction (another issue for another day that I'd like to talk to you folks about).

I want to be very clear that I am not here to criticize or otherwise diminish the good work of our 4-year college and university partners. I do not see this legislation as pitting community colleges vs 4 year colleges and universities, rather as I alluded to earlier, I see this as a workforce development issue. Gogebic has strong partnerships and experiences high levels of cooperation and collaboration with the UP's college and universities. But like us, it is not easy for any of the region's postsecondary institutions to meet everyone's needs

As we have partnered with regional health care providers in support of our Allied Health Programs, we have identified that the demand for BSN credentialed nurses is a current and increasing need. Changes in the health care field are driving the change to a higher level entrance credential; the demand for BSN's is not expected to diminish. In an effort to address this demand, early in 2013 we asked NMU to assist us by locating a BSN completion program on our campus. Based on workforce surveys, we believed then, and still believe, that there is sufficient interest and numbers to support a BSN program locally. NMU's then President expressed interest in working with us to satisfy this workforce need, but a program has not yet been made available. I do recognize that NMU has had lots going on—change in leadership, programming, considerations regarding the delivery given the distance, etc., and I am not blaming them for the lack of programming, but 1 ½ years later the need for BSN's remains.

HB4148 also includes baccalaureate degree authority for our Ski Area Management Program, one of three such in the country, and the only one that maintains and operates two winter recreation facilities as learning laboratories. Currently we have an articulation agreement for a bachelor's completion program for this program in place with NMU, but distance remains a barrier. What would be helpful in this program and for other occupational programs is a business oriented bachelor's completion program, a management toolbox, if you will. This would help prepare future entrepreneurs, those interested in striking out on their own, or those going to work for others and wanting to progress in their field.

In my perfect world, these bachelor completion programs would be offered on our campus by one of our 4-year college and university partners. But I also know that this can be difficult to put in play, and as I said earlier, none of us can be everything to everyone either. Yet, the workforce needs remain. Select community college baccalaureate programs provide another option in meeting student goals and workforce needs.

Gogebic is not interested in becoming a full 4-year college, nor are we interested in tearing down the collaboration the UP colleges have built up. Similarly, I do not believe the impact on transfer, that is, significantly reduced numbers of students transferring between our institutions will occur. Our primary MI transfer institutions will remain MTU and NMU—I do not see that changing. At Gogebic, because of the distances involved and student demographics, the students for which the community college baccalaureate provides opportunities are those who would not be able to travel to 4 year colleges and universities because of the barriers of family, work, time, cost, and weather. These are folks that the 4-year colleges and universities are not getting now, but would further their higher education if opportunities were available to them.

Lastly, I do want to reiterate, my interest is in broadening student opportunities and strengthening our regional and state-wide workforce, not diminishing or replacing our 4-year partners. While I cannot speak to all of Michigan, I can tell you that the UP colleges and universities work well together and communicate frequently. But, none of us can be everything to everyone. It is my belief that the community college baccalaureate, while not necessarily needed by every community college in Michigan, does offer additional opportunities to create a more educated workforce, responds to workplace demands, and address issues of college access and affordability. Given Michigan's goal to strengthen its economy by creating a more educated workforce, and utilizing that talent as an economic driver, the community college baccalaureate is one more option available to move us closer to attaining that goal. From my perspective we ought to seriously consider every option and opportunity to create a better prepared workforce and economic strength.

Thank you for your time and consideration. Are there any questions?

James A. Lorenson

